

Advocacy in Action Conference Called “Excellent,” “Well-Organized”

By Peggy O'Brien-Murphy (Seattle-King ADS)
and Katherine Boyd (W4A)

Aging and disability advocates from around the state attended an April conference in Tukwila, WA on grassroots lobbying, hosted by Seattle-King County Aging and Disability Services, the National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a), and the Center for Aging Policy (CAP). The six hours of training, from two well-seasoned Washington, DC presenters, were packed with information and activities. Presenters were Janet Witt from the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, and Janice Jackson, immediate past director of n4a, now in the newly created position of Director of n4a's advocacy & lobbying subsidiary, the Center for Aging Policy (CAP). Advocacy In Action Conference goers benefited from Janice and Janet's years of invaluable experience as these two experts led the conference with sharp wit and savvy.

Janice and Janet gave excellent talks on the Older Americans Act, senior voting practices and demographics, long term care, working with the media, and several national political issues. These presentations provided attendees with a good background in basic aging policy. A “training kit” was provided for each of the conference participants outlining the basics of advocacy. Information included from how to conduct a rally, to working with the media, recruiting allies and understanding the federal legislative process.

The highlights of the conference, however, came during the advocacy exercises. Conference-goers brainstormed in group, analyzing a newspaper article on an advocacy rally to determine how to use the press effectively, and putting themselves in the shoes of legislators on tough political issues. Richard Dorsett, Executive Director of the W4A and its main lobbyist, moved to the other side of the metaphorical table to become a legislator in a role-play with four advocates, showing the many innovative strategies that advocates must use when talking with their lawmakers to stay “on message.” The last exercise of the day required attendees to brainstorm advocacy strategies with groups of people from their own regions. A partial list is given in the sidebar to the right.

n4a has 655 area agencies on aging and is the representative body in D.C. for the interests of 220 Title VI Native American aging programs. Clearly, with advocacy training of this caliber taking place across the county, it is indeed possible that a uniform, national, collective influence of advocates and activists for older adults and people with disabilities, will be able to raise momentum for meeting the critical and urgent needs of many vulnerable citizens in our states and communities.

Advocacy Strategy Ideas from the April Conference

Write letters to Op-Ed columnists who have expressed support for aging and disability issues.

Put “There’s No Place Like Home” Tagline on Ad Council letterhead; Put it on Bumper Stickers

Hand out Legislator Contact Information to Ad Council Members

Hold information booths at local fairs

Ask legislators to attend Ad Council volunteer presentations

Hold a slogan-writing contest

Hold a State-wide Ad Council Conference

Enlist local celebrities to advocate for aging causes

Hold presentations on advocacy issues at Senior Centers at Food Banks

Use special days that already exist to pass out information - such as baseball Senior Day, Aquarium & Zoo Senior Days, AARP Elder Days. Develop a calendar of these special days and distribute it widely.

For more ideas from the conference, visit the link
<http://www.cityofseattle.net/humanservices/ads/advisorycouncil>

**National Association of Area Agencies on Aging (n4a)
Center for Aging Policy (CAP)**

**ADVOCACY IN ACTION TRAINING
April 12, 2002
Tukwila, Washington**

8:00 a.m. REGISTRATION OPENS

8:45 a.m. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

**9:00 a.m. OLDER AMERICANS ACT: A MANDATE FOR ADVOCACY
NAVIGATING THE RULES AND REGULATIONS OF ADVOCACY**

The Older Americans Act is the only federal law that requires advocacy on behalf of Older Americans. Because advocacy is specified within the Act, it clearly demonstrates Congressional intent, which directs AAAs and advisory councils to serve as advocates for seniors and the programs that benefit them. This mandate is a powerful tool and weapon in our advocacy work. N4A and CAP's auditors and expert legal counsel have compiled tips on how to effectively navigate the rules and regulations governing advocacy to guide you in mobilizing the grassroots.

**9:20 a.m. THE KEY ROLE OF ADVOCATES IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS --
GROUP EXERCISE**

10:00 a.m. COURTING THE SENIOR VOTE

Older voters comprised 22 percent of the vote in 2000 and were the major "swing" vote in the 2000 election. Explore the implications the senior vote has for building senior power in the 2002 mid-term elections. Find out more about building campaign "messages" and harnessing the power of the senior vote to promote issues such as funding home and community-based services and a Medicare prescription drug benefit.

10:30 a.m. BREAK

10:45 a.m. ISSUES IN LONG TERM CARE

One of the major challenges facing policymakers is how to provide a comprehensive long term care system that appropriately and cost-effectively addresses the needs of a rapidly growing number of older people who will experience more difficulties carrying out their day-to-day activities. Learn about the realities of long term care in America and how the Older Americans Act, Social Service Block Grants and the recent "Olmstead" Supreme Court decision impact home and community based services. Explore public attitudes and employee concerns regarding eldercare issues in the workplace as well as misconceptions about financing and coverage of long term care. Find out what you need to know to assess the long term care proposals in the 107th Congress.

**11:15 a.m. GRASSROOTS MESSAGES AND STRATEGIES: RAISING THE
VISIBILITY OF HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES**

Major demographic and policy trends will affect the demand for, the supply of, and choices regarding long term care in the future. The huge demographic swell of baby boomers will create a formidable political force for long term care as they begin to reach retirement age. Learn how to move the policy debate on long term care forward with these and other important messages to help persuade policy makers and opinion leaders to support greater funding of home and community-based care. Learn how to “pitch” your story to elected officials, the press, find “hooks” to attract various interests groups and other public relations techniques.

NEWS STORY DEVELOPMENT -- GROUP EXERCISE

12:00 p.m. LUNCH

1:00 p.m. EFFECTIVE MESSAGING TO PROMOTE YOUR ISSUE-- ROLE PLAY

**1:30 p.m. MAJOR ISSUES FOR SENIORS IN THE 107TH CONGRESS:
ENTITLEMENT REFORMS & THE CHALLENGES AHEAD**

Learn the inside-the-beltway explanation of why leaders in Congress are finding it difficult to achieve consensus on issues in the 107th session. It can be confusing for seniors when both parties have developed pro-senior legislative agendas that seem to so similar on prescription drug coverage and on protecting Social Security and Medicare. Whether the proposals tinker around the edges or create fundamentally changes in programs important to seniors, learn what you need to know to assess the various proposals based on what is important to retirees.

2:00 p.m. BREAK

**2:15 p.m. PUTTING THE GRASSROOTS TO THE TEST:
DEFINING WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR LAWMAKERS**

Advocates have the opportunity to create their own messages, strategies and activities in a “hands-on” session to convince lawmakers of the need for expansion of home and community-based care.

**3:00 p.m. LEGISLATIVE FUNDING PRIORITIES:
WHO DECIDES HOW THE MONEY IS SPENT?**

Policies adopted by Congress and the White House can have a significant affect on both the growth in our economy and how any surplus is spent as was demonstrated by the enactment last year of a \$1.3 trillion tax cut. Learn more about the ins and outs of our federal budget and the impact the "war on terrorism" and tax cuts may have on growth in vital, poorly funded discretionary spending programs such as the Older Americans Act. How these programs are funded will depend on how effectively advocates engage voters and others in determining future spending priorities. Learn the role that your elected officials play in the legislative process and how to work effectively with elected officials to impact spending priorities.

3:30 p.m. CLOSING COMMENTS

n4a Advocacy in Action Training
April 12, 2002
Tukwila Community & Senior Center
Tukwila, WA

Evaluation Summary:

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Very Good</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>0 Response</u>
1. Older Americans Act Mandate for Advocacy	18	30	2			3
2. Key Role of Advocates Group Exercise	22	21	6	2		2
3. Courting the Senior Vote	20	25	5	3		1
4. Issues in Long Term Care	22	18	7	1		4
5. Grassroots Messages & Strategies Raising Visibility of HCBS	10	24	7	2	1	9
6. News Story Development Group Exercise	14	23	10	3		3
7. Effective Messaging Role Play	29	21	1			2
8. Major Issues for Seniors in the 107 th Congress	13	20	12	1		7
9. Putting the Grassroots to the Test: Defining What's at Stake	17	19	7	1	1	8
10. Legislative Funding Priorities	8	18	6	1	2	18

Written Materials:

Handouts	31	16	5			1
Advocacy Handbook	27	16	4			6